Back to Cattell

Back to Cattell: Integrating Intra- and Inter-Individual Personality

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Abstract

Hopwood (2018) has returned to what occupied Cattell from the 1940s: integrating intra- and inter-individual personality 'structures'. As Hopwood observed, personality psychology still suffers the 'divide' Cattell bemoaned, between quantitatively/experimentally oriented empiricists and philosophical/clinical theorists. Despite types' many limitations, Hopwood proposed a model to articulate classic 'normal' personality 'types' analogous to 'disorders'. This will be harder because there are many ways for personality to 'go wrong', but one way to 'go right'. Something that makes the difference is 'wisdom' about when to 'be ourselves' and when to accept the inevitable.

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. –Leo Tolstoy (1873-1877), *Anna Karenina.*

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference. –Reinhold Niebuhr (1951), *Serenity Prayer.*

Hopwood (this issue) has returned to the question that occupied Raymond Cattell from the 1940s onward, though he didn't note the connection. This question is how to integrate intra- and inter-individual personality 'structures' to arrive at an understanding of the 'whole person'. Getting back to it matters because personality psychology remains far from answering it. Hopwood noted that quantitative/experimentally oriented empiricists have focused on trait models, especially the 'Big Five', while philosophically/clinically oriented theorists have focused on diagnostic categories, or 'types', with

little cross-communication until rather recently with the development of DSM V. As Cattell also bemoaned, Hopwood argued that this has not been good for either approach. He recounted how recognizing traits appears to be enriching clinical understanding of personality disorders (PDs) and suggested that considering types more actively could analogously enrich study of normal-range personality.

This is important too, because trait models are showing weaknesses similar in severity to those Hopwood recounted in detail for PD's types. Facets, even individual items, often show stronger associations with 'outcomes' than do traits; associations often rest primarily on overlapping measure content; facets and items often show stronger and/or differently signed associations across traits and 'outcomes' than within them; individuals vary considerably in degree of trait 'display; and intra-individual personality 'structures' often do not resemble inter-individual ones. Moreover, there are large individual variations from the so-called 'normative' patterns of trait development, and the field has a tendency to read much more 'stability' into the presence of moderate, even so-called 'large', correlation over time than is warranted (Johnson, et al., 2012).

There are many reasons for these fissures. One is that the now-dominant Big Five model was established ad-hoc. Like PD's types, it was based largely on subjective judgments by personally dominant 'players' rather than empirically grounded theory (Block, 1995; 2010). As Hopwood noted, clinical psychology is making use of 'normal' personality psychology's dominant trait model, warts and all, in bringing traits into consideration. 'Normal-range' personality psychology cannot reap this practical advantage in considering types, however, because clinical psychology's types are by definition maladaptive/'abnormal'. This is going to make implementing Hopwood's suggestion considerably more difficult.

This is because Tolstoy's observation about families is just as true of individuals within them: there are many ways to be distressed and maladaptive, but broadly only one way to be happy/well adapted. The Big Five summarize this 'one way' conveniently for modern life in 'economically developed' countries: one needs to act quite extraverted, quite conscientious, quite emotionally stable, quite open/intellectual, and quite agreeable. Not acting so enough is 'maladaptive', as is acting so too much. Beyond that, nothing much matters, and like for PDs, one can score those optimal moderately high 'trait' levels through any combination of 'symptoms' (item endorsements). I suggest, however, that this broad

summary misses the point. It's captured by the 'Serenity Prayer' though, whatever your 'god'. What makes 'successful adaptation', 'wellness', and 'sanity' is not 'having' these levels of these socialization-saturated so-called 'traits', but knowing when it is important to display the behaviors used to assess them, and coping effectively afterwards with whatever stresses that levied. Skill in doing this, however, is not where the 'color' in personality lies. Personality's color is all in patterns displayed when one has the freedom to act as one prefers (when social demands are low), when one cannot or will not meet demands levied, and when one can't cope effectively with stresses brought on by behaving appropriately or failing to. In other words, we are kidding ourselves if we think some 'trait' of conscientiousness is associated with longevity, school achievement, job performance, etc, What is associated with those 'outcomes' has nothing to do with some general proclivity or preference and everything to do with 'wisdom to know the difference': sensing when and how to get oneself to do whatever needs to done to pay attention to health, class or job assignments, social relationships, etc., without creating unmanageable stress.

Personality is the leftovers: interests, preferences, relative enjoyments, cognitive/emotional responses, perceptual schemas, devoid of socialization. Hopwood suggested that personality assessments need to include more maladaptive behaviors, but what they really need is to be stripped of adaptive relevance, and we need to add measures that assess specifically to what degree respondents are socialized and how they cope with its demands. Hopwood's model suggests what to do then, but, as his 'signatures' of PDs illustrate, to implement it we also need to carve out prototypical situations that span some dimension of social 'demands' of prototypical 'kinds', devoid of 'traits'. What are common situations where acceptance of inevitable is important? In what situations can anything go? Who tends to see which situations 'accurately' and who does not and why? How do those who see them 'accurately' cope when doing what is expected is difficult or not preferred? Why are we in such situations anyway? What do those who do not see situations 'accurately' do? What is the fall-out? How does all this develop? Are there 'middle grounds' in 'seeing accurately'? When do we learn from mistakes and do something different? When do we not and why? Does 'knowing the difference' reflect sensory or cognitive perception, affect, and/or motivation?

Developing measures that can do all this is plenty difficult, but even it is only the beginning. Hopwood appropriately noted that perception, affect, motivation, behavior, and the analogous states in

others unfold not in neat sequences but ‘overlappingly’ and often even simultaneously. Regression-based models cannot handle this, so we need new statistical tools too. It’s high time we try though! Relying on trait models, especially the Big Five, has started running us in circles -- of our own making. Cattell would be disappointed to see what’s gone on since he left.

References

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